Article

The Female Detective, Neurodiversity, and Felt Knowledge in *Engrenages* and *Bron/Broen*

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Kathleen McHugh[1]

Abstract

The neurodiverse female detective in transnational crime dramas embodies complex ways of seeing the gender-based violence these series frequently contain. This detective both orients and disrupts their narrative and visual fields with what I will argue is her surveilling yet troubled look. She inhabits the longstanding transnational tradition of the male defective detective and derives from two recent Anglo-European generic staples: female-led crime dramas and neurodiverse protagonists. In her, gender trouble in the look and its object meet up with the problem of the norm. Beginning with the example of *Engrenages* (*Spiral*, 2005) and then focusing on autism spectrum detective Saga Norén (Sofia Helin) in *Bron/Broen*, this article considers how the generic familiars and innovations vested in this character alter the dynamics of the gaze, recast the significance of empathy and justice, and enable violence, gender, and everyday social norms to be unsettled in potentially feminist ways.

Keywords

gender-based violence, TV crime drama, the defective detective, autism, empathy, neurodiversity, felt knowledge

> If signification and representation (what things mean) are no longer the only primary realm of the political, then bodily processes (how things feel) must be irreducibly central to any notion of the political.
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> —Puar (2013, 178)

[1]University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Kathleen McHugh, Professor and Chair, Department of Film, Television and Digital Media, Professor, Department of English, UCLA, 203 East Melnitz Hall, Box 951622, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1622, USA.
Email: mchughla@humnet.ucla.edu

The troubled female detective in transnational television crime dramas embodies complex ways of seeing the gender-based violence these series frequently contain. She both orients and disrupts their narrative and visual fields with what I will argue are her surveilling yet troubled looks. Empathy and identification frequently shape this detective's investigative gaze at crime victims and survivors, sometimes overwhelming her and/or compelling her to break rules of professional conduct. Or her gaze and behavior subvert feminine gender codes and/or those of normalcy, which, in turn, draw others' stares at her. Those female detectives whose "trouble" is neurodiversity inhabit the longstanding transnational tradition of the male defective detective (Loutensock). Whether neurotypical ("normal") or neurodiverse, this figure has recently animated transnational series and remakes including *Bron/Broen* (2011–), *The Bridge* (2013–2014), *The Tunnel* (2013–), *Dem som Dræber* (2011–), *Those Who Kill* (2014), *Forbrydelsen* (2007–2012), *The Killing* (2011–2014), *Engrenages* (2005–), *The Fall* (2013–), *Happy Valley* (2014–), *Marcella* (2016–), and *Top of the Lake* (2013–).[1] This article will consider detectives whose "trouble" or "defect" draws from and blends two current Anglo-European generic staples: female-led detective dramas, this special issue's topic, and representations of neurodiverse protagonists. The latter have become a millennial familiar that speaks to viewers globally. Numerous paranoid, bipolar, autistic, depressed, hysterical, and sociopathic protagonists animate TV genre reboots in transnationally distributed Anglo-European series.[2] Crime dramas that feature autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or "Aspergerish" investigators make up one such transnational cluster, with Sherlock Holmes an exemplary figure. These protagonists' neurodiverse qualities inflect generic hermeneutics concerning the crime (whodunit?) with diagnostic ones concerning the investigator (what is wrong, odd, exceptional about him or her?), enabling textual, gendered, and transcultural innovations. At the same time, the series they lead both use and elicit insights from disability studies and psychology in their narratives and in paratextual commentary and critical analysis.

I will use the concept of the stare from disability studies, specifically as theorized by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in her 2009 *Staring: How We Look*, to consider how the neurodiverse protagonist affects the visual field of series she leads. Beginning with the trouble that the neurotypical female detective poses to detection and forensic knowledge, in her affective responses and as both subject and object of forensic and erotic gazes, I then consider how the neurodiverse detective both mobilizes and invites the stare. I argue that the stare troubles these series' forensic and erotic visual regimes by incorporating another look that is directed at the detective's socially non-normative behavior. Such neurodiverse protagonists include ASD detectives Saga Norén in *Bron/Broen*, Sonya Cross in *The Bridge*, and Elise Wasserman in *The Tunnel*; sociopathic Catherine Jensen in *Those Who Kill*; and Marcella Backland with an unspecified fugue disorder in *Marcella*. The look and agency of these women, particularly of those with ASD, foreground questions of empathy and "felt knowledge" in relation to sexual violence and justice. These questions are directly related to but not wholly reducible to gender. Before addressing this figure and what her way of seeing enables, I will situate her within some of the relevant debates concerning the neurotypical female detective in serial TV.

The Female Detective: Current *and* Familiar

Scholars have emphasized the problematic conflation of the female detective with the usually female (or feminized) victim, what Lindsay Steenberg astutely terms *forensic femininity* (Creeber 2015, 21; Steenberg 2013, 50, 67–71; Tasker 2002, 48, 53). Female detective and victim also complement each other. As Barbara Klinger's (2018, 27) essay in this special issue outlines, the detective/victim pairing generates a trenchant, irresolvable feminist paradox that serves as part of this genre's transnational legibility. The progressive import of the female detective's agency is offset by "archaic" representations of victimized femininity (p. 26). Unlike the female victim, however, the female detective has been "much discussed," her gender frequently seen as innovative.[3] Interestingly, generic innovation itself is a paradoxical concept. Paolo Russo and Steenberg assert that new TV serial crime dramas strive to be "both current and familiar" in a developmental logic wherein the genre "move[s] forward while looking backwards" (2016, 301). Certainly, claims for innovation rise to the fore and then wane. If, in 2013, Steenberg hailed the "relatively new figure [of] the female investigator" (49), three years after that, Deborah Jermyn observed that a female detective, in and of herself, no longer constituted a "unique selling point" (Jermyn 2017, 264–65).

This detective has repeatedly become new while also invoking familiar themes in a common generic language inflected most recently by different stages of feminism. While Janet McCabe (2015, 30), Nete Schmidt (2015, 424), Yvonne Tasker (2002, 25), and Su Turnbull, (2014, 156–57) ground her genealogy in transnational female authors (Lois Cayley, Karen Blixen, Sara Paretsky, and Agatha Christie respectively), Steenberg begins with the innovations of Clarice Starling in *Silence of the Lambs* and Dana Scully in *The X-Files* (2013, 55). Together with their objects of study, these and other critics' arguments dialogically reinvent and renew the meaning of (her) gender in serial crime drama as it interacts with other generic variables. One important variable concerns knowledge. In Jermyn's analysis of *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)* (2000–2015), she notes how the series links the investigators' gender to different kinds of generic truth and the effects of that linkage on the genre. The show implicitly masculinizes scientific certainty and feminizes forensic psychology, instinct, and affect by affiliating the former with Gil Grissom and the latter with Sara Sidle, even if Sidle's instincts are correct (Jermyn 2007, 82). *CSI's* insistence on evidence-based truth claims precipitates a "relative disinterest in the criminal mind . . . [and] motive" (2007, 80–81). Jermyn observes that the show's implicitly gendered preference for science over psychology deflects "from a more complex or discursive engagement with crime" (2007, 82). Gendered modes of knowledge affect the genre's discursive range.

By contrast with *CSI*, the Anglo-European detectives under consideration here use serial time's greater narrative expanse to painstakingly reconstruct the most truthful and complete story of the victim and (usually) her untimely end. To accomplish this restoration, the detective assembles and makes sense of forensic evidence and data; she also, ideally, tries to re-experience and feel the horror and trauma the victim suffered and to similarly surmise the murderous impulses that drove the killer. Thus, she models a way of seeing in which her *felt* knowledge—the physical and emotional

sensations generated by her empathetic identifications with victim and killer—shapes her mental processes of interpretation, analysis, and judgment. Her TV profession compels her to identify and empathize across gender positions and profound moral and ethical divides as both a perpetrator and victim.[4]

At the same time that the detective's practice of felt knowledge compels these forensic and frequently cross-gender identifications, she also anchors the gender inversions routinely evidenced in these shows. Paired with a sensitive male investigator, she is rational, withdrawn, nonemotional, and often sexually assertive (Laure Berthaud in *Engrenages*, Sarah Lund/Sarah Linden in *Forbrydelsen/The Killing*, Stella Gibson in *The Fall*, Saga Norén/Sonya Cross/Elise Wasserman in *Bron/Broen/The Bridge/The Tunnel*, and Marcella Backland in *Marcella*, though the latter's reasoned and reserved persona is shot through with outbursts of rage and violence). For Jason Mittell, these gender inversions are among a number of highly successful storytelling innovations, emerging in the 2000s, that make up "complex TV." Specifically, TV's widespread integration of "feminine" appeals (serial melodrama's focus on emotion, relationships, and open-ended seriality) into "masculine" genres "has led to more fluid possibilities of gender identification and . . . challenging of rigid stereotypes of gendered appeals" (Mittell 2015, 246).

Relevant to my argument are Mittell's (2015) assertions about gendered characters and the audience appeal that emerges from these complex serial integrations. As he argues, "If centering a masculinist genre [crime dramas, espionage thrillers, and science fiction] on a female figure can disrupt traditional gender norms, the infusion of serial melodrama into male-centered narrative often calls the dominant definitions of masculinity into question" (pp. 252–53). The appeal of these complex serials combines "moral legibility, narrative drive, and emotionally resonant characterization all working to create a shared 'felt good'" (p. 245). Mittell references Linda Williams's work on melodrama generally and *The Wire* (2002–2008) particularly in delimiting the appeal of these shows. It follows that female-led crime serials, with gendered look and subject matter (gender-based violence), possibly shade complex TV's appeal of a "shared felt good" into a form of critical "felt knowledge." We might see this knowledge as central to what could be called the complex feminism that arises from these shows.[5]

Gender inversions in serial crime dramas disrupt traditional gender norms, especially welcome in light of the gender-based violence at their core. At the same time, these gender inversions are frequently triangulated with male trauma, whether sustained by the perpetrator (Jens Hansen in *Bron/Broen*, Paul Spector in *The Fall*), investigator (Pierre Clement in *Engrenages*, Stephen Holder in *The Killing*, Martin Rohde in *Bron/Broen*), or relative or lover of the victim (Benoit Faye in *Engrenages*, Stan Larsen in *Forbrydelsen/The Killing)*. Along with female victim and detective, all suffer trauma but do so in distinct registers. Trauma is motive for the perpetrator, suffering and demise for the victim, and source of knowledge (of their trauma through her own) for the detective. Insofar as trauma becomes, through the focalization of the detective, an overarching source of forensic knowledge as well as of emotional resonance and moral legibility, it insinuates the detective's felt knowledge into the "felt good" that Mittell identifies. McCabe (2015, 38) speaks to the dynamic I am

attempting to address when she references the feelings of injustice and inequality these shows elicit that cannot be apprehended (figuratively or literally) by "emancipatory rhetoric" and the "rule of law." These female detectives and their fraught felt knowledge precipitate yet go beyond the discursive engagement with gender-based violence that Jermyn references.[6] Thus, in the way this detective detects, in the way she is compelled to look and feel, gender trouble meets sexual trauma meets the pointedly unrealizable (feminist) fantasy of reparative justice.

While the female detective currently orients innovations specific to the genre (gender inversions) and to contemporary televisual storytelling writ large (infusion of serial melodrama into more resolution-based "masculine" genres), her troubled looking, especially in the case of neurodiverse detectives, fits the longstanding tradition of the dysfunctional or defective detective, which stretches back to odd, but brilliant eccentrics C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes (Turnbull 2014, 183; Defective Detective n.d.).[7] This tradition includes asocial, alcoholic and workaholic, and physically disabled detectives and those who are neurodiverse.[8] Psychologists and fans have repeatedly diagnosed Sherlock Holmes, in his many iterations, with autism (Loftis 2014, 1), while Benedict Cumberbatch identifies his version of this character in *Sherlock* (2010–) as "a high functioning sociopath" (Woods 2014, 3). Various TV series identify detectives of both genders as neurodiverse, as OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) or bipolar or "on the spectrum": Monk in *Monk* (2002–2009), Carrie in *Homeland* (2011–), and Dr. Temperance Brennan in *Bones* (2005–2017) respectively. These shows' characters exhibit what the neurodiverse community refers to as the savant stereotype (Dale 2013, 1; Woods 2014, 3); that is, their protagonist's disorder produces their genius.

By contrast, and setting her neurodiverse status aside for the moment, the Anglo-European female detective's dysfunctions tend to be gendered. They often involve past violent sexual trauma that aligns her with the crime victim, fosters her forensic expertise, and "suggest[s] that professional women are always already damaged in some fundamental way" (Steenberg 2013, 19). Yet rather than her experience being personalized and individuated as in the U.S. examples Steenberg analyzes, in the Anglo-European shows considered here, the victim and detective's shared experience are coupled with a sustained focus on social institutions (police, judiciary, medical establishment, social services) and their clientele (the victims, the homeless, lost girls, sex workers).[9] Taken together, they underscore how pervasive gendered violence is. As sexual and familial trauma often constitutes the detective's backstory, this story also conveys gendered violence's chronic character and after effects. Frequently, the detective's hermeneutic mysteries extend beyond those of the victim across multiple seasons (*Forbrydelsen/The Killing, The Fall*, and *Bron/Broen*), and this backstory shapes her (and our) ways of seeing and feeling the serial narrative as it unfolds. These shows present gender-based violence as generic, as a norm. Through the lens of the neurodiverse female detective, a newly current and yet familiar figure, they also mobilize felt knowledge, but with a twist. If customarily, such knowledge blends empathy with reason, the ASD detective, with a compromised relationship to empathy, presents a special case that nevertheless reaches back to the genre's literary origins.

The Gaze and the Stare: Ways of Seeing from *Engrenages* to *Bron/Broen*

The neurodiverse female detective redirects generic conventions of character eccentricity and defect to gendered questions of the norm. What then is the nature of the norm in crime drama? If autism is a disorder characterized by a profound allegiance to order and system, the ASD detective of either gender hyperbolizes a central generic trope: faith in, the need for, and the simultaneous othering of detectives who reason without affect, tact, or requisite social skills. As such qualities accord with neurotypical or normal masculinity, ASD male detectives are generically normalized by their gender. From Dupin and Sherlock forward, they underscore the neurotypical female detective's novelty or "trouble"—she feels, she interacts, she has empathy. The female ASD detective confounds this gendered system in complex ways that I will discuss. For the moment, it is important to note that crime drama's neurodiverse protagonists are part of a widespread academic and cultural zeitgeist. As neuropsychology and neuroscience have grown increasingly prominent, more traditional psychodynamic approaches have migrated from psychology to English classrooms, from clinics to critical theory, and, most recently, from textbooks to film and television genres wherein neurodiverse characterizations provide (clinical) nuance and complexity to gender binaries and melodramatic moral certainties. These shows thereby craft a substantive dialogue, staged in visual narrative, between diagnostic and generic typologies.

In this section, I will read this dialogue through visual analytics provided by both discursive parties to it: the gaze from media studies and the stare from disability studies. Specifically, I use Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (2009) theorization of the stare to read the interplay these series stage among forensic, erotic, and socially normative-based forms of looking. Garland-Thomson specifically distinguishes the stare from the media studies gaze: "we gaze at what we desire, but we stare at what astonishes us" (p. 13). While the gaze is theorized as an "oppressive act of disciplinary looking that subordinates its victim," the stare is an intense visual exchange grounded in the social and in appearance (9–10). She writes,

> Staring is an ocular response to what we don't expect to see . . . an urgent eye jerk of intense interest. We stare when ordinary seeing fails, when we want to know more. So staring is an *interrogative* gesture that asks what is going on and *demands the story.* (Garland-Thomson 2009, 3, emphasis added)[10]

Staring is interactive, social, and seeks knowledge (pp. 13–15). It "establishes a social relationship between the starer and the staree . . . through which we act out who we imagine ourselves and others to be" (p. 14) The starer often reflexively presumes a normality, an integrity, a state of nonexceptionalism that the staree does not possess. Staring is also "a conduit to knowledge," about making the unknown known, "and the incomprehensible legible" (p. 15). In its disciplined, goal-driven form, staring generates knowledge through a specific practice: "staring as information collection requires concentrated, focused, and prolonged looking" (p. 20).

We stare at the dead, the anomalous, the differently abled, at what is out of place or unpredictable. In this and in its knowledge-seeking sense, the stare certainly pertains within the visual coordinates of the serial crime drama, most obviously as the look of witnesses and detectives at the (often) dead victim. While the witness stares involuntarily—horrified, traumatized, shocked—the stare of the investigator blends that shock with forensic attention and empathy. In fact, the detectives' capacity to combine these two stares (involuntary/traumatized, and focused) frequently figures in their characterization and their narrative angst. Whereas the erotic gaze objectifies, sexualizes, and genders, the stare generates social and forensic meanings, interrogating the shocking, the strange, and the traumatic. In both its forensic and social forms, staring poses queries and establishes exchanges among distinct and diverse ways of seeing.

Two series, *Engrenages* and *Bron/Broen*, demonstrate different uses of the gaze and the stare in their opening seasons. While the latter show features a neurodiverse female detective, the former does not. *Engrenages* has foundational significance to Anglo-European crime dramas and establishes a representational baseline with which to contrast how neurodiversity and the stare work in *Bron/Broen*. Considering this series, McCabe (2012, 104) observes, "Before *The Killing*, there was the Swedish *Wallander* [2005–10]—but the European crime wave started with *Spiral* [*Engrenages*]."[11] Furthermore, she distinguishes this show from its U.S. antecedents, contrasting their easy closure and "strong moral compass" with *Engrenage's* hard, hyper-real look at French criminal justice—the police, judiciary, the public—"and the social aspects of those relations" (p. 101). Her distinctions echo Jermyn's that the French show exhibits a complex discursive engagement with crime not seen in forensic series such as *CSI*.

Engrenages's insistent gender inversions include a striking deployment of the gaze and the stare in relation to male trauma. The first season startlingly enacts the attempted restitution of a female body from the object of a forensic and horrified stare to that of the erotic male gaze. Tellingly, this restitution is coded as a *male* trauma, suffered by Prosecutor Pierre Clement. The pilot opens on the series' gateway body (Klinger 2018)—a mutilated yet mannequin-shapely white female corpse in a dumpster. Her head and face are swathed in bloodied cloth; although her gender, race, youth, and the brutal nature of her demise are evident, she cannot initially be identified or individuated. At the crime scene, Clement stares down at the corpse; his expressionless face, à la Kuleshov, "expresses" what another detective leaning over the body explicitly articulates: "horrific."

Clement then meets Captain Laure Berthaud, the head of the investigative team, who, while working on the crime scene, has also cast a desiring gaze at him. Clement, oblivious, announces his forensic hypothesis to her, one subsequently repeated almost verbatim by several male officials involved in the case: pathologist, judge, and detective. Each assert that the ferocity wreaked on the faceless corpse means, "she must have been beautiful." Like Freud's contrary interpretation of the Wolfman's dream (that the dream wolves' stillness must mean "the most furious motion" [Freud 1918/1989, 409]), Clement and his fellows reason from what they can see, what compels their stares—the ferocious defacement and mutilation of the corpse—to what they cannot, her face, her beauty. They reason not only that contrary as imperative ("she

must have been beautiful") but also that imperative—aesthetic/erotic female beauty—as cause (thus, the ferocity). Whereas for the male legal team, the victim's beauty, and by inference, their foreclosed erotic gaze at her, is of the utmost significance, Laure Berthaud concerns herself with more straightforward forensics—who is the victim, where was she killed, who did it? Over the course of season 1, she identifies the victim, finds a photograph that indeed depicts a beautiful woman, and finally discovers the crime's perpetrators. Insistent gender inversions structure season 1, wherein Berthaud reasons, commands, and synthesizes evidence (also bedding Clement), while her male colleagues (lead investigator, prosecutor, and judge) make repeated and significant mistakes, frequently based on their own affective and erotic relationships.[12]

At season's close, a sequence that mirrors the opening renders Clement back at the crime scene looking down at the dumpster, now filled with tires (S1 E8). He initially imagines the murdered body, and then the woman, made whole, clad in a beautiful red dress, lounging before him on the tires, eyes closed, as if on a fashion shoot. He then envisions her murder through split second flashbacks with the sound of blows appointing each cut. We see him wince. Several things are notable here. Clement's (and the series') look is staged, momentarily, as the conventional erotic gaze; this male gaze images/imagines a redress (literally and figuratively) of the dead woman, restoring her face, her beauty, and her red dress. The vision of her beauty then precipitates the vision of her death. Significantly, the scene depicts the injury as now inflicted on Clement, specifically on his gaze—he visibly flinches as he/the series visualizes the blunt force annihilation done to the object of their erotic gazes. We literally see static in the visual image as we hear the thud of bodily blows. Thus, the damage and defacement done to erotic beauty is visually and audibly represented as trauma inflicted on the male gaze (Figure 1).

Several feminist scholars have responded to the troubling erotics of male investigators' visual exploration of female corpses.[13] By contrast, in series where the chief detective is female, this stare is often framed as empathetic and implicitly interactive rather than erotic (Tasker 2002, 48). However, where the female detective is neurodiverse, the stare acquires added critical and possibly political functions in the sense Jasbir Puar asserts in the epigraph above. These protagonists and their behavior often invite stares rather than gazes, perplexity rather than desire. At the same time, they themselves mobilize the stare as central agents within visual fields organized by their forensic look. The profoundly gendered dynamics of visual knowing in series with neurodiverse female protagonists alter those evidenced in shows where the neurodiverse character is male (*Sherlock*) or where the detectives' maverick quality is not coded, explicitly or implicitly, as diagnosable.[14] For the remainder of this essay, I focus on ASD detective Saga Noren in *Bron/Broen* because her neurodiverse characterization works to decouple empathy, fundamental to forensic felt knowledge, from her gender.

Bron/Broen's distinctive use of the gaze and the stare commences in the pilot's opening sequence (S1 E1). A woman's body, dressed in business attire, is found bisecting the Oresund Bridge connecting Copenhagen, Denmark with Malmo, Sweden. The body evidences no visible signs of injury: no wounds, blood, or sexual assault. Danish

Figure 1. The redress of the male gaze.

Figure 2. Saga's stare.

detective Martin Rohde (Kim Bodnia) stands over the body and gazes at Saga Noren, his Swedish counterpart, as she arrives on scene. Martin's look expresses frank sexual interest and friendliness, while Saga only has eyes for the murder victim; she avoids making eye contact with Martin, save to quickly glance at him when she officially introduces herself. Otherwise, she stares, either blankly into space or attentively at the body with which she is visually compared by a quick cutaway shot (both are blond and attractive) (Figure 2).

Saga and Martin become binational coinvestigators of an apparently socially conscious serial killer, nicknamed the "truth terrorist," traumatizing both cities that abut the bridge. The killer's crimes highlight social issues: unequal treatment before the

law, homelessness, funding cuts to mental health clinics, and child labor infractions by multinational corporations. The gateway body on the bridge is actually two bodies, cut in half and pieced together. The upper half belongs to instantly recognizable Swedish politician, Kerstin Ekwell, killed days before the body was found. The lower half belongs to Danish prostitute, Monique Brammer, killed a year earlier, her death left uninvestigated until attributed to someone prominent and wealthy. If the *Engrenages* gateway body is a generic female victim (young, white, beautiful, and naked), the *Bron/Broen* body is an elaborate puzzle, a social statement, representing a continuum of women who are treated unequally before the law. Staged as an installation piece (the lights of the bridge go off and then turn on again, as in theater), the body "incorporates" features of the site, the splice of the body aligned exactly with the national border between Sweden and Denmark.

As with the corpse to which she is visually compared, Saga is an enigma. While she appears to be a conventional postfeminist protagonist, dressed in leather pants and driving a Porsche, her manner disconcerts. She routinely defies polite, socially normative (and implicitly gendered) behavioral norms. Martin asks her if she has children. She responds, "Why would I want them?" He says he has never heard anyone ask that question before, and she says, "Many should have asked" (S1 E1).[15] Saga never smiles and stares frequently, at bodies, evidence, forensic information, and at witnesses and suspects when she questions them. Otherwise, she systematically avoids eye contact. For her, looking is professional, sometimes sexual, but not interpersonal or emotional. The show gives multiple examples of her inability to gauge or respond to the feelings of those on whom she fixes her stare. At the same time, she unerringly follows official, procedural, and ethical rules. At the initial crime scene, she refuses to let an ambulance pass through carrying Charlotte Soringer's (Ellen Hillingso) husband because his life is not in immediate danger.

Martin and others regularly stare at Saga, precisely for interpersonal and emotional reasons. Aghast to amused, they stare, discreetly, because she does not adhere to social conventions related to femininity, empathy, discretion, or tact. Their stares at Saga make narratively and thematically salient the tacit rules of empathetic social interaction that her ASD prevents her from following. In a male detective, such behavior would be seen as masculine. Saga's difference introduces drama and mystery to what might otherwise be rote social interactions and small talk in the workplace and on the street. Through these social stares, *Bron/Broen* complicates the queasy and unsettling blend of forensic stares and male erotic gaze witnessed in *Engrenages*. At the same time, men take Saga as an object of the erotic gaze (Martin, Daniel, August, Jakob, Henrik). She, however, is oblivious to their looks and to her appearance being connected to her sexuality. While studying forensic journals and pathology reports, she feels randy, sticks her hand down her pants, and then goes to a bar to pick up a guy (S1 E2). (She does so by making eye contact and giving him the ghost of a smile.) Saga's lack of feminine self-consciousness, her inability to, in John Berger's (1972, 47) terms, watch herself being watched, effectively undoes the presumptions of the male gaze. After all night work sessions, Saga routinely changes her shirt publicly in the office. When she does so in front of Martin, he stares at her, his face registering increasing

discomfort and embarrassment. He looks around to see if anyone else is looking (S1 E1). Saga is all business. Subsequent to this scene, Martin's interest in Saga shifts to a kind of social forensics. He aligns with Saga's Swedish team who bond with him over their stares at her, recognizing their shared difference from her distance, impersonal demeanor, and absolute allegiance to rules.

Autism, Empathy, and Ethics

Saga fulfills the narrative function of many female detectives, which is both to investigate the crime, while being investigated and visually scrutinized by coworkers, authorities, and the narrative itself, along the same lines as the female homicide victim (Steenberg 2013, 50). Although there is a physical resemblance between Saga and the gateway body, several factors in *Bron/Broen* nuance or confound the conventional generic conflation between female victim and investigator. These include the composite character of the corpse, the conflation of Saga, the corpse and several other female characters, and finally, the paradoxical similarities between Saga and the killer.

The composite corpse is simultaneously middle-aged and young, Swedish and Danish, established and precarious, visible and invisible, and engaged in high and low public labor and roles (politics and sex work). Rather than being a singular victim of gender-based violence, the body on the bridge presents a range of women vulnerable to its effects. As social composite, this body forecloses the narrative pathos generated by the victim's family and friends. Instead the composite corpse encompasses a social, cultural, and forensic spectrum of crime and loss, all decidedly incommensurate. Thus, rather than signifying within the hermeneutics of the profile and singular victim, the composite embodies social hierarchy: upper and lower, who can be seen and not seen, who is valued and who is not.

Just as the composite corpse registers a social spectrum of male motives for and female vulnerabilities to gender-based violence, the narrative presents similarly socially diverse blonde women, all physical doubles for Saga, who experience various kinds of gendered violence: Mette, Martin's wife, suffers unspeakable harm because of her husband's lying and cheating; Sonja, Stefan's client, is a young mother battered by her boyfriend; and Veronika, Stefan's "lost girl" sister, is homeless, abused, neurodiverse, and ultimately a victim of the serial killer's poison attack.[16] These visual and narrative resonances infuse the program with a pervasive sense of gendered precarity, experienced by (white blond) women across borders and social classes, and of different levels of expertise, accomplishment, and resources. At the same time, the series avoids any overarching gendered morality. Saga's sister, Jennifer, and troubled teenager Anja (Fanny Ketter) both have fatally abusive mothers, and August (Emil Birk Hartmann) loses his life because his father betrays a former business partner.

Within this discursively complex mise-en-scene, Saga's ASD provides for a key reversal. As the series progresses, her affectless, un-self-conscious attention toward others renders her a reflexively astute analyst of what is represented as "normal" gender behavior. She does not understand behavior guided by subtle niceties and discretion, and is seemingly compelled to ask very pointed questions. After hearing about

Martin's dalliance with Charlotte, the industrialist's widow, Saga logically concludes, "You don't believe in monogamy." Martin responds, "I do." "Then why do you cheat?" she asks (S1 E7). When Martin chides her for asking him a telling question in front of his wife, Saga says, "It is not a problem that you cheat, but that Mette found out" (S1 E7). Through Saga, *Bron/Broen* reveals such polite behavior as often empty, misleading performance, at best, and blatantly dishonest at worst. If at the outset, we see Saga through Martin, her ASD rendering her guilty of numerous social misdemeanors, in the end, we see Martin through her affectless, asocial, and scrupulously honest perspective. We learn that his warmth, empathy, and maverick sensibility have led him to sexual dalliances and deceptions that have instigated the serial killer and, ultimately, a devastating loss to his family. Early on, Martin asks Saga, "Are there any rules you don't follow?" She parries, "What [rules] should we ignore if people are helpful to us?" (S1 E5).

These key questions—about the relationship between rules and social niceties—deflect Saga and Martin's inversely gendered affects and performance to questions concerning affect and ethics. Martin empathizes and continually does emotional outreach that, with women, often becomes flirtatious and sexual. The rules Martin consistently ignores have to do with truth and communication. He lies constantly to prevent conflict, to protect himself, to be diplomatic. By contrast, Saga never lies; she does not possess the affective framework, the concern for others' feelings that would inhibit her expression of the truth as she sees it. As everyone's reactions to her bald-faced truths imply, people expect her to "lie" or to at least edit the truth with empathy for the hearer/listener. She never does.

As an inveterate truth-teller, Saga is subtly aligned with Jens, the serial killer and "truth terrorist." If her honesty prompts her disregard for other people's feelings, his "truths" are the social problems that his serial killings expose. Her truth telling exists on a continuum with Jens's performative truth-acts (a ruse for his real, personal motivations for the killings) and Martin's lies and cheating. Unlike Martin who is presented as neurotypical, both Saga and Jens are neurodiverse—she with ASD and he as a psychopath. These disorders distinguish them from Martin in a very particular way. Both ASD and psychopathy notably manifest in compromised abilities to empathize. Empathy, an interpersonal affect, encompasses two distinct functions: first, an ability to recognize what someone else is feeling, and second, an ability to have an appropriate affective response to those feelings (Baron-Cohen 2011, 12). Psychopaths and people with ASD differ in their empathetic capacities based on these two functional axes: accurate recognition of others' feelings (cognitive function) and appropriate response to those feelings (affective function). While psychopaths have no cognitive impairment—they are often astute readers of others' feelings—their affective or subjective response is inappropriate, self-serving, or nonexistent. They see others as objects to do with as they please and do not care what they feel. People on the autism spectrum, by contrast, have compromised cognitive function; they cannot read or recognize others' feelings (Baron-Cohen 2011, 45–61, 67–86). However, their affective responses to others' feelings, once they understand what they are, are highly functional (Baron-Cohen 2011, 73). They do care and can care deeply (Baron-Cohen 2011, 45–61, 67–86).

That caring, interestingly enough, derives at least in part from another feature of ASD. Along with her compromised ability to empathize, Saga's ASD results in her need and ability to "*systematize* to an extraordinary degree" (Baron-Cohen 2011, 74). This manner of processing information leads her and others with ASD not to be immoral, like psychopaths, but often super-moral. People with ASD are tuned to recognize patterns, to look for and find security in rules. Social and emotional interactions make them uncomfortable because they do not seem to have rules, to be based on reliable and verifiable truth (Baron-Cohen 2011, 74). Following logical rules, by contrast, "provides . . . direct access to the truth, since our predictions are confirmed as true or false" (Baron-Cohen 2011, 77). ASD individuals who have intact affective empathy and systematizing "have a strong desire to live by the rules and expect others to do the same, for reasons of *fairness*" (Baron-Cohen 2011, 87, emphasis in original).

While Saga has trouble anticipating, reading, and understanding the social cues given off by others, when she is prompted or logically discerns someone's feelings, she responds appropriately. Because she has carefully *studied* the serial killer and his patterns, she knows and cares about how much danger Anja and later, August, are in. She logically ponders why the serial killer did not kill Martin when he had the chance and comprehends before anyone that August, not Mette, is the last and most important of the serial killer's targets. Along the way, she has also studied and internalized the rules that Martin and Hans have given her: praise your staff, share personal information, and, above all, protect your partner. As might be expected, these rules come into conflict with Saga's inability to lie and to feel empathy.

Fittingly, the last two episodes realize this conflict in moments of Saga touching and/or looking directly at other characters. When Martin learns that Jens has Mette and his children, he gasps in panic. Without looking at him, Saga reaches over and puts her gloved hand over his and squeezes it (S1 E9). Later, at the hospital, being treated for the serious gunshot wound Jens inflicted on her, Saga begins to dress and tries to leave. A nurse tells her she is in no condition to go. She insists, and the nurse has Saga squeeze her fingers, which she can hardly do. Saga asks to try again and musters her strength to do so, while looking steadily into the nurse's eyes and telling her she is ok (S1 E10). We see Saga lie in this exchange, effectively distracting the nurse from perceiving her weak grip by making direct eye contact and holding her gaze; she does so in the interest of protecting her partner. In the penultimate scene, Martin, Jens, and Saga face off in an exchange of looks where the importance of affect, rules, and truth all come to a head under the bridge where the initial composite corpse was discovered (S1 E10).

Saga, Martin, and Jens come to this confrontation, each located on bisecting continua or spectrums related to affect (empathy or the lack of it), truth (a commitment to honesty and the facts, no matter the consequences for oneself or others or the lack of it), ethics (conformance to civil, rule-based behaviors or their lack), and neurodiversity or the lack of it. Jens uses his capacity for *cognitive* empathy to manipulate August and seduce Mette. His "honesty" as the truth terrorist is, like his empathy, completely instrumental. Although highly systematic in his pursuit of revenge, he has no ethics, follows no rules, and has no feelings for others. Although more ethical than Jens,

Martin, like many maverick detectives, breaks rules to effectively fight crime and solve cases. His commitment to ethics can be instrumental, as, in his view, the ends can justify the means. Martin is highly empathetic, emotional, intuitive, and has an inchoate "felt knowledge" about the masked killer. Yet his own complicity and lack of honesty prevent him from grasping his feelings' forensic import—that the killer is his former partner and best friend. On these continua, Saga's superior ethics derive from a "felt knowledge" where her ASD proclivity for systems and rules fosters her capacity for affective empathy. Relatedly, her compromised ability to empathize actually guarantees her honesty because her expressions of truth are not affected by others' feelings.

In the final confrontation with Jens and Martin, Saga tries to lie (about August's death) to stop Martin from breaking the rules (shooting Jens) in a fit of grief and rage. She and Martin have their guns drawn, but before any gun is fired, they exchange a series of direct, prolonged looks at each other. Martin demands to know if August is dead, and Saga attempts to defer the question, telling him they found him. Jens baits him, saying repeatedly that Saga is lying. Martin asks her repeatedly, and finally, she looks directly at him, weeping, and shakes her head no. He turns to shoot Jens as Saga shoots him, to stop him from killing Jens.

Notably, through the comparative and interactional dynamics among these three characters, season 1 of *Bron/Broen* presents a complex meditation on truth, ethics, and empathy that is inflected but not determined by gender or gender inversions. Saga's character, though never overtly diagnosed, hews closely to the diagnostic criteria for ASD, and the series creators make use of these qualities in a rigorous and nuanced consideration of empathy and its relationship to justice and ethics.[17] While this series follows on other Anglo-European predecessors by eschewing "easy closure" and strong moral binaries, Saga's neurodiversity also enables affect or its lack to be disengaged from a gender binary, inverted or otherwise. McCabe writes of Saga, "the Asperger's . . . hints at moving beyond the politics of gender . . . and the ambiguity of difference" such that Saga can "adhere without sentiment to those universal standards of human rights and democratic values" (McCabe 2015, 41). Season 1's plot, together with Saga's character arc, displaces the binary of gender difference, invited by Saga and Martin's pairing, with the question of the norm. The stares at and by Saga foreground this question, especially as it encompasses a range of social relations related to gender but not wholly vested in it. At the same time, throughout, *Bron/Broen* insists not on difference or binaries but on spectrums or continua of social norms, privilege, and threat, of characters and qualities, of more or less destructive expressions of sexuality, desire, affect, honesty, and ethics.

If the question of feminism, crucial to these series' transnational lingua franca, seems both imperative and impossible to pose in the case of the female detective, Saga's ASD provides a possible innovation or intervention. Through the gateway body, truth terrorist plot, and most importantly, Saga's character, *Bron/Broen* implicitly challenges "what things mean" (gender, gender-based violence) precisely by upending and unsettling generic notions of "how things feel" and for whom. Feminist criticism of these series, including *Bron/Broen*, is noticeably marked by (a range of)

feelings or felt knowledge. Jermyn (2017, 273) explicitly theorizes and performs such knowledge, reflecting on her and other feminist critics' "felt or embodied response" to *The Fall.* She articulates a critical approach "in which the cerebral *and* the 'physical' are not at odds but come together, being prompted by a political sensibility (an investment in feminism) while felt and expressed in an embodied way" (p. 273). Writing about female detectives in *Forbrydelsen* and *Bron/Broen*, McCabe finds, in the "feel" or "feeling" these heroines present or elicit, an utterance of "the new" (p. 31). She writes that they "come to represent what has rarely been seen before" and "promise 'the coming age of a different law' for representing the female self differently" (p. 31). That different law is related to feelings of injustice (p. 38). In maintaining but displacing gender from what it means to how it feels, from a neurotypical to a neurodiverse perspective, *Bron/Broen* suggests that what we take for normal can sometimes be the most dangerous of all.

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Notes

1. Lindsay Steenberg notes that in the forensic subgenre, female investigators tend to be "deeply troubled" because many have been "violently victimized." While that characterization holds true for the detectives discussed here, some are also neurodiverse, which complicates the nature of their troubles (Steenberg 2013, 63).
2. The examples are far too numerous to list here, and they cover all genres. Detectives and investigators tend to suffer bipolar disorder (Claire Danes, *Homeland*) or are autistic or sociopaths or drug addicts. Notably, the latter three defects have all been attributed to Sherlock Holmes in his many print and screen manifestations. Willa Paskin (2013) writes that Temperance Brennen has "an 'adorable' or 'funny' version of Asperger's" as opposed to Saga Norén's "super-serious" portrayal.
3. Examples would include chapters or articles in Alberti (2017, 2, 15–17), Jermyn (2017, 259-276), McCabe (2015, 29–43), Schmidt (2015, 423–56), Steenberg (2013, 50–98), and Turnbull (2014, 153–85).
4. Steenberg mentions empathy but focuses on "female forensic intuition"—she sees this as related to women's superior moral authority in American culture, an authority that derives from the experiences of motherhood and victimhood (Steenberg 2013, 64). McCabe discusses the "instinctive empathy" that Lund shares with the female victim (p. 30) that she distinguishes from the "feel" Lund has for the crime scene, a feel that is not instinctive but based on "hard investigative work" and "an uncompromising ability to look" (p. 40). Interestingly, Will Graham from the Hannibal Lecter novels, film, and TV show presents the most sustained exploration of an investigator who suffers and is damaged by his extraordinary and neurodiverse ability to empathize viscerally with serial killers.

5. As the articles in this special issue attest, the feminism these shows generate is complex; it derives not only from their poetics (use of characters, sound, image, technology, mobilization of affect) but also from their generic, contextual, and cultural references and travel. This term references Mittell's "complex TV" but describes a political poetics that is resolutely transnational.
6. Steenberg's (2013) notion of the female investigator's moral authority "frequently narrativised as a criminalistically informed women's intuition" informs this argument (p. 57).
7. Loutensock (2017).
8. *Ironside*, NBC, 1967–1975 featured the lead detective, played by Raymond Burr, in a wheelchair.
9. Barry Forshaw (2013) links Nordic Noir's "unsparing examination of society" on Swedish authors' leaning to the left and their move away from what they saw as the prose genre's bourgeois "accoutrements" in the 1960s (p. 14). Eva Novrup Redvall (2013) examines the multiple historical, institutional, and cultural forces that underwrite what she refers to as "double storytelling": that Nordic media's public service obligation results in shows that have a "good story" that is combined with "ethical and social connotations" (p. 68).
10. Garland Thomson's phrasing here recalls Mulvey's when she writes of the voyeuristic gaze and its relation to narrative: "Sadism demands a story."
11. The "first French language drama ever picked up by the BBC," it did better in foreign territories than its own domestic market, becoming "the biggest French TV series export ever" (by 2012) (McCabe 2012, 102, 104).
12. Her lead investigator snorts cocaine and misses a key clue on a stakeout; Prosecutor Clement's best friend is the dead woman's boyfriend, which he learns only belatedly after inappropriately sharing investigative information, and the presiding judge loses the victim's diary, a key piece of evidence.
13. For feminist scholarship, see Steenberg (2013, 10; 76–80).
14. In *Sherlock*, the dynamic with Watson is homosocial, and his ASD directed to his genius. In *Elementary*, Sherlock is a deductive genius as well.
15. An ironically prescient question given that Martin will be responsible, by proxy, for his son's death. Saga speaks from her own experience growing up in an abusive household with a mother who had Munchhausen by proxy.
16. The narrative pointedly invites the comparison between Saga and Veronika, as both are neurodiverse, came from abusive homes, sport blank stares, and have no self-consciousness about baring their chests in public.
17. Series creator Hans Rosenfeldt, who also created *Marcella*, imagined Martin as a warm, family man to distinguish him from the dysfunctional "middle-aged white detectives in Sweden" (McKay 2014, 2; *Immediate Media Company*, 2016). While he imagined Saga's dissociated interactional style as complement and gender inversion to Martin, director Charlotte Sieling and actor Sofia Helin saw Saga not as a gendered anomaly but as a neurological one—as being on the autism spectrum (Khaleeli 2012, 3; McKay 2014, 2).

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Author Biography

Kathleen McHugh, Chair of UCLA Film, Television and Digital Media, is the author of *Jane Campion*, and *American Domesticity: From How-To Manual to Hollywood Melodrama*. She has published on transnational media and film feminisms, global melodrama, experimental autobiography, and celebrity in *Signs, Camera Obscura, Cultural Studies, Jump Cut, Screen, South Atlantic Quarterly*, and *Velvet Light Trap*. She is currently researching the role of neuro-diverse protagonists in contemporary genres.